

Informal Notes from Break-out Discussions

On day 2 of the workshop, participants took part in nine different break-out groups to discuss specific questions. As there were three groups in each of three concurrent sessions, it was not possible for all participants to contribute directly to all questions. However, the informal nature of the group discussions ensured that overlapping questions were raised in more than one group, so that most workshop participants would have had the opportunity to express their views on most of the questions. These notes provide an incomplete summary of the matters discussed, and do not incorporate comments made on the written drafts of the workshop report circulated to participants in the weeks after the workshop.

A. How can teachers be more adequately prepared for teaching Indigenous students, particularly for teaching in schools in remote locations? How can processes for selection, training and support of committed and capable teachers be improved?

- Specialist training for all teacher candidates in the teaching of Aboriginal children
- Critical that Aboriginal people be involved in design and implementation of teacher preparation programs
- Teacher candidates to learn to teach Aboriginal Studies, particularly for students in mainstream schools;
- Teachers working in bush schools, or with students from remote Australia, also need special training in teaching English as a second language and in how to educate Aboriginal students about the values and expectations of mainstream culture; these would not necessarily be covered in courses designed for teachers delivering Aboriginal Studies courses.
- In-service course should be mandatory for teachers going to teach in Aboriginal schools with requisite practicum placements
- Careful processes of selection of suitable teaching candidates should occur
- ESL/Tesol be an essential component of preparation for all teacher education programs
- That Education Departments examine recruitment practices and further explore recruiting experienced teachers
- Successful programs should be identified and reviewed.

B. How to enhance the evidence-base and show how it will improve Indigenous education?

- Must involve Education Depts, principals/teachers/politicians
- Mythbuster: Communities and schools are over-researched
- Existing evidence can be rapidly reviewed, so that innovation and reform need not be unnecessarily delayed while awaiting the results of primary research

What evidence is needed:

- New initiatives to have an evidence base and planned evaluation
- Engage with existing evidence both local and from other contexts
- Focus on research that will bring tangible benefits
- Research on drivers of educational success/teaching/learning/school functioning/levels of practice

- Understand the meaning and purpose of education at community level
- Research social determinants of educational outcomes
- Need for multiple methodologies – observational/interventional – quantitative/qualitative – but rigorous.
- Better involvement of commonwealth/school/policy stakeholders at every stage of the research process from planning to translation
- Setting of research agenda must take account of everything it takes for a child to be well educated – environment, family, health etc

How to take matters forward

- Research schools – partnership and reflective practice
- Dedicated supernumerary researchers in schools
- Incorporating EBP in teacher training
- Advocacy plan and countering institutional obstacles
- Promote the ideas of research, evaluation and translation with educators, teachers & parents
- Point to the international evidence linking education to health and social welfare
- Emphasise that effective research should be a partnership, and that partners from health, social welfare and community development may be needed to tackle some of the difficult questions in Indigenous education

Unresolved issues

- Research translation processes
- ? Indigenous specific.

C. How can the basics of language development, literacy and numeracy be adequately taught in bush schools from an early age?

- Language development is the basis for the development of English literacy
- Maintain and refine 30 yrs experience. Emphasise past successes and build on those
- Learn from international experience and research
- Adopt proven methodologies for teaching ESL/ESD in bush schools – include modelling of standard English by teachers
- Support remote comms to employ adult educators (with literacy skills) to assist community/family literacy devt – away from school. Provide incentives for these workers to complete new Dip of LLN in VET practice (?)
- Support the devt and distribution of age appropriate literacy materials for high school kids
- Build on successful programs - eg Clontarf to dev our understanding of how to support engagement of students in 2ndary ed – lit/num

D. How can teachers in Indigenous schools also deal with the challenges of teaching a wider curriculum about living skills, about the expectations and values of western culture, and the opportunities that education can provide?

- Teachers face a difficult task if, as well as teaching literacy and numeracy, they have to teach “western culture” to students in remote schools;
- If this is thought to be necessary, teachers will need additional training and support;
- National curriculum may create challenges/narrow options for implementing a wider curriculum
- Opportunities should be provided as young as possible for work education/experience through well articulated partnerships with business and governments
- All government and local tenders should include an obligation to train/employ a quota of local people
- Enterprise and small business training for local organisations be provided
- A recognition that the teaching of mathematics which underpins a lot of cultural understanding is not well taught – improvements are needed in teacher education, recruitment and curriculum resources
- Commonwealth, State and Territory funding model for VET and VETiS should accommodate the teaching of underpinning language and numeracy
- Funding for courses should go to schools not training providers of Education departments
- Families need support in exploring wider education options

E. How can early childhood education be linked to maternal and child health programs at community level? How can parallel health problems (eg otitis media & poor nutrition) be better managed to support educational targets?

- Integrate all infant, early childhood, health, welfare, education services
- Encourage teachers’ role to include health/wellbeing and health pros to use opportunities for teaching – eg nos when weighing, encouraging choice of order in screening test
- Identify leaders in trans-disciplinary cooperation and practice
- Pre-service courses should include cross-disciplinary teams learning together

F. What can we learn from different approaches to education for students from remote locations? Tiwi school? Yirrkala school? Other experiences? What are the pros and cons of boarding schools, interstate schools?

Yirrkala

- Community decision to have 2ndary provision on homelands - only small numbers
- Students selected for 2ndary based on attendance
- Decision not to send to Yirrkala CEC of Nhulunbuy HS
- Some issues for those not selected – disengaged from learning
- Workplace coordinator based at Y through remote partnership agreement – responsible for secondary ed and VET – apprenticeship program available. Scheme is working – graduates now working in health, education and office

Planned boarding facility will be on homelands – not in town – with focus on mainstream education. Local association to run it. (Currently students go to 2ndary school for 3 days then fly home. New facility will enable students to stay home longer.

- Often a gap b/w leaving school and taking up VET course at 21-22 yrs
- Disengaged students – need support
- Transition from school – keep students in VET to jobs
- Families like boarding facility – supported environment for educ away from community problems

- TiwiBoarding facility can't cope with 24/7 as requested by Tiwi Council. Govt wants same. Model show to be significantly flawed – staff and students tired and nothing to do. Weekend activities – 'hunting won't be enough' – city school students can go shopping etc

WA experience

- What works well in boarding facilities? (Meekathara, Coolgardie, North Esperance) Most success are schools with best student selection process where staff travel to meet families/communities – 'cherry picking'
- Schools that can articulate education outcomes – eg Wongutha (north of Esperance) has become a RTO– offers accredited training in trades.
- Schools where students also enrolled in WA Certificate of Education courses
- Students from strong family and community support adjust better – students used to freedom find it hard to adjust to secondary school

What didn't work

- Schools where students' home base was not far away. Families wanted kids to be there: kids didn't want to be there

General comments/suggestions

- Finding suitable hostel staff is very difficult
- Need to find better ways about hostels are managed – eg develop career pathes for staff
- Success hinges on families – eg East Kimberly send kids to St John's (Darwin) – this is an individual family response and not a whole community response
- A critical mass is needed for community based facility – 150-200 students though can run smaller nos with different funding formulas
- Larger, better supported schools should be placed in catchment areas. Furthermore, as the 'world is streaming ahead of kids so fast' – kids should go away from communities for 2ndary ed – kids can make it in boarding schools if supported and resourced
- Should take 5+ students from communities – not just 1 or 2
- Wiltja program caters for stronger families
- Movement toward diversification – what parents, Ed dept want – eg Tiwi, Kormilda, Mararra – need to work within a range of choices
- Level of support needed – quality support for all kids not just kids from stable families. Need resources for weekend activities to prevent boredom
- Need more structures & supported activities in 2ndary facility – will also help with behaviour problems
- Funding formula needs to be different – may be generous now but not enough – need supplementary funding
- Clontarf program works well in supporting kids from mainstream. At Uriara had positive benefits but didn't impact on attendance

- Remote service delivery – sticking with traditional model needs to be improved. Need to explore alternative models of education – teacher support, local teachers, using new tools.
- Develop partnership with interstate schools – exchange teachers and students with high performing school (NOT just cultural tourism) - NB exchange teachers need to be adequately prepared

G. What changes are needed in the expectations of teachers, parents and students? How might these changes be brought about?

- Homeland schools are trying to raise parent expectations – sending children to school
 - Strategies to assist parents to work with teachers – emotional/social support for kids and families
 - Include community members in discussions – role of cultural consultant
 - Aboriginal staff key to working with parents, teachers, community about raising expectations
 - Parents get upset and complain about absence of Aboriginal teachers and the need to rely on non-Ab teachers
 - Parents need to keep teachers up to the mark
 - Staff turnover a problem
 - First time teachers under lots of pressure
 - Need experienced teachers who can assist/cope with behavioural issues
 - Parents should be able to access school when they want. Community should be able to use the school for wider community use
 - Aboriginal parents be better informed about actions they can take to remove poor teachers
 - Raising bar higher – clear expectations about what parents want from teachers
 - Teachers raise expectations of students
 - Electronic record keeping to document attendance
 - Need connections b/w home and school – not all left up to teachers
 - Kids find new rules at school difficult
 - Check on rules re touching/hugging in NT schools- Gary says none allowed
 - Need strategies for ESL learning – kids not taught complex language based on language and cultural facilities
 - Educators have trouble with congruence b/w expectations and ways of achieving these
 - Remote kids don't get to 'Double Bay' results the same way – need to find agreement on how to do this
 - Define 'high expectations' – need explicit definition
 - Induction program for new teachers
 - School authorities need to actively find ways to assist parents/other Ab families to engage in education process
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- Teachers - expectation of technical expertise
 - Parents – demands from schools/ toward themselves/keep teachers on their toes
 - Students – expectations in relationship to school
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- Kids are capable of learning and it can be enjoyable
 - Poor teachers unacceptable

Governance suggestions

- Central Australia to create structures for small schools to come together
- NT Ed works with school councils to give them more say/power – school council is the strongest institution in Homelands
- Need support for teachers/coordinators for behaviour/literacy and numeracy advisors in class
- Need parallel programs for social skills – for parents re parenting with active engagement outside of school context
- Need community governance
- supporting EC services/community focus very important
- perhaps mobile preschool service – properly evaluated
- improved record keeping

H. How might governance and coordination arrangements outside the classroom be improved?

Case study – Yirrkala School Council

- 13 different clan groups represented on the school council (includes community and outstation schools). Each school has an Action Group.
- Responsibilities:
- Recruiting staff (not working)
- 4 year strategic plan
- Annual reports
- Review lit and num results
- Attendance
- Behaviour management
- Tensions arise because:
 - School council decisions/protocols sometimes conflict with directives from NTDET
 - Govt presenting decisions made in Darwin without negotiation with community school organisations – eg bilingual education
- Effectiveness often depends on priorities of school principal

WA AICS Model

- Community governing body (CGB) umbrella for all enterprises including education – School governing body (SGB) is a CGB committee
- SGB drawn from association membership
- Recommendations
 - Govt negotiations on educ and training take into account existing community structures with the aim of improving educational outcomes
 - That SGBs are supported by processes and protocols formally recognised and prosecuted by goals that focus on lit and num development, attendance and community cultural priorities
 - Develop school/community partnerships within the framework of existing SGB structures with a view to growing governance capacity
 - Where appropriate communities delegate negotiation responsibilities to individuals with the aims of reducing 'too many meetings' and growing expertise
- Examine potential for private sector/philanthropic org to be involved in training of Ab people in community leadership roles

I. How to help Indigenous students in mainstream schools?

- What do you do to have quality education for all students?
- Education needs to be about excellence
- Need for teachers to be taught Aboriginal Studies in their teacher training courses
- Indigenous students should not be removed from the classroom for remedial classes – need in-class assistance for students and teachers
- Need a literacy-rich environment
- Promotion of positive self identify
- Enhance students' academic self concepts – eg science, English etc
- Teachers need to value the knowledge/skills kids bring to the classroom
- Link schools and local businesses re employment
- Teachers need to be recognised as 'professionals', as are doctors/lawyers in order to make teaching a desired profession – also need renumeration
- Positive parent programs – build ability of parents to teach their children to read etc
- More emphasis on literacy in teacher ed programs
- Teacher ed courses to encourage teachers to talk/work with community
- Mentors for new teachers for first few years out
- Support for teachers from experts in literacy
- Encourage Indigenous students to set and attain high aspirations
- Examine mainstream curriculum for opportunities to extend and incorporate relevant knowledge and skills of indigenous students
- VET courses – Indigenous kids are being streamed – need a balance of HEd and VET – policy makers and schools need to think this through
- Local mentors to talk with students – eg doctors and other professionals
- Need quality advice early in secondary schooling